

Full Length Research

Breaking Down Barriers: Internal Democracy and the Dynamics of the 2025 All Progressives Congress (APC) Local Government Primaries (LGPs) in Lagos State.

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Accepted 29 December 2025

This study employs a pragmatic mixed-methods design to examine internal democratic practices and barriers during the 2025 APC Local Government Primaries (LGPs) in Lagos State. A structured survey questionnaire was administered using a five-point Likert scale to 400 respondents—selected via simple random sampling across five Local Government Areas (LGAs) and conducted thematic analyses of key party documents. Findings reveal that the majority of members are dissatisfied with current practices, citing transparency issues and elite dominance. Regression analysis shows that improved internal democracy significantly boosts perceptions of fairness and legitimacy. Therefore, these results underscore the need for institutional reforms, enhanced communication channels, and direct participation mechanisms to strengthen party credibility and electoral competitiveness.

Keywords: All Progressives Congress (APC), Elections, Godfatherism, Internal democracy, Legitimacy, Local Government Primaries (LGPs), and Political party.

Cite this article as: Bakare, K. M., Adebambo, W.O. (2026). Breaking Down Barriers: Internal Democracy and the Dynamics of the 2025 All Progressives Congress (APC) Local Government Primaries (LGPs) in Lagos State. *Int. J. Polit. Sci. Develop.* 14(1):1-14

Introduction

Internal party democracy (IPD) is now a critical issue in Nigeria's democratic development. Political parties are gradually moving away from patronage-based structures towards more participatory models. In this transition, transparent and inclusive candidate selection is essential. It strengthens internal legitimacy and builds public trust (Ononogbu & Okoroiwu, 2019).

In recent years, debates have intensified over whether electoral processes within major parties, such as the All Progressives Congress (APC) (one of Nigeria's major political parties, formed in 2013), truly reflect democratic ideals. Scholars argue that when party members play a meaningful role in candidate selection, the process gains legitimacy. This, in turn, supports the consolidation of democracy across the country (Asuquo, 2022).

Lagos State has become a focal point in these debates. The APC's local government primaries (LGPs) which are internal elections conducted by political parties to select their official candidates for chairmanship and councillorship positions at the local government level attracts attention because Lagos is Nigeria's most populous and economically important state. Control of Lagos also means influence over grassroots power that shapes both state and national politics (Awojobi, 2025). However, recent events have exposed serious concerns. Protests after the May 2025 primaries revealed grievances from members who felt excluded from decision-making (Olatunji, 2025). The party's Appeals Committee also received over 100 petitions from aggrieved aspirants. Critics alleged manipulation and a lack of transparency (MSN, 2025). These controversies raise questions about fairness and highlight the challenge of reconciling formal democratic procedures with entrenched informal power dynamics.

Empirical studies show that inclusive methods, such as direct primaries, improve perceptions of internal democracy. Asuquo (2022) found that transparent and participatory procedures enhance the credibility of internal elections. Research on the APC further demonstrates that weak internal democracy undermines the party's ability to consolidate democracy at both local and national levels (Ononogbu & Okoroiwu, 2019). Conflict resolution studies by Anjorin and Adayilo (2021), also suggest that unresolved disputes, often caused by ignoring democratic norms that damage party cohesion and reduce public confidence in elections.

Despite these insights, research on LGPs remains limited. Most studies focus on national-level dynamics, leaving state-level contexts underexplored. Studying the APC's 2025 Lagos primaries therefore goes beyond party politics. It represents a microcosm of Nigeria's broader struggle for democratic consolidation. By examining how internal party democracy is practiced or undermined, this study contributes to debates on whether Nigeria is building resilient institutions or repeating cycles of elite domination. At the same time, it offers practical proposals for reform. These proposals aim to strengthen grassroots participation, transparency, and accountability; the core pillars of democratic consolidation.

Research Problems

Based on reports and debates surrounding the 2025 APC primaries in Lagos State, it was discovered first, that there was lack of transparency and accountability. There were widespread allegations of irregularities—in the form of impositions, opaque voting processes, and the side-lining of grassroots voices. These issues call into question whether the primaries truly reflected internal democratic principles.

Secondly, elite domination and power imbalances. The reported influence of senior party leaders and entrenched elites (via delegate voting or the consensus method) suggests that internal democratic practices might be undermined, distorting fair competition among aspirants.

Thirdly, communication and intra-party engagement deficits. With many aspirants and party members expressing dissatisfaction—evidenced by petitions and protests—there seems to be a critical gap in communication. This gap may prevent the free exchange of ideas and a genuine participatory process.

Lastly, structural and procedural challenges. The hybrid selection processes (delegate voting versus consensus approaches) and the inconsistencies in how different LGAs managed the primaries may have created barriers that hinder the effective application of internal democratic norms.

Research Objectives

The study aims to address these problems by pursuing the following objectives:

- i. Evaluate how the principles of internal democracy were implemented during the APC local government primaries, with a focus on transparency, accountability, and inclusiveness;
- ii. analyse the varying voting or consensus approaches used in different LGAs and determine how these mechanisms influenced candidate selection;
- iii. pinpoint the internal, structural, and procedural challenges (such as elite domination, inadequate communication, and unclear nomination protocols) that obstruct genuine democratic participation within the party; and
- iv. develop strategies and reforms aimed at strengthening internal party democracy in APC.

Research Questions

To guide the investigation, the following research questions was posed:

- i. To what extent were internal democratic principles (transparency, inclusiveness, accountability) upheld during the 2025 APC local government primaries in Lagos State?
- ii. How did the use of delegate voting and consensus approaches influence the fairness and perceived legitimacy of the primary process?
- iii. What are the key internal barriers (e.g., elite domination, lack of clear communication, procedural irregularities) that prevented a fully democratic process?
- iv. How does the influence of party leadership and established political elites shape the dynamics of candidate selection in the primaries?
- v. What reforms or policy changes can be recommended to enhance internal democracy within the APC for future primaries?

Research Hypothesis

Null Hypothesis (H_0): There is no significant relationship between the quality of internal democratic practices and the perceived fairness and legitimacy in the candidate selection process.

Alternative Hypothesis (H_1): There is significant relationship between the quality of internal democratic practices and the perceived fairness and legitimacy in the candidate selection process.

Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods design situated within a pragmatist–interpretivist paradigm. The approach integrates quantitative and qualitative techniques to provide a holistic understanding of internal party democracy and the barriers shaping the dynamics of the 2025 APC local government primaries (LGPs) in Lagos State. By triangulating survey data with qualitative insights from party documents, the research both quantifies members' perceptions and situates them within the broader institutional context (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

The study population consists of approximately 2.5 million registered APC members in Lagos State, based on the 2021 enrolment figures. This population includes aspirants, delegates, party officials, and observers. Using Taro Yamane's (1967) formula with a 95% confidence level and maximum variability ($p = 0.05$), the ideal sample size was calculated to be 400 respondents. To ensure representativeness, Lagos State's local government areas (LGAs) were stratified into the five IBILE divisions—Ikorodu, Badagry, Ikeja, Lagos, and Epe. One LGA was randomly selected from each division using a Simple Balloting-Random System (SBRM). The selected LGAs were Ikorodu, Ojo, Agege, Ibeju-Lekki, and Lagos Island. Eighty respondents were drawn from each LGA, ensuring balanced representation across the state.

Data collection employed structured questionnaires designed around a five-point Likert scale (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree). The choice of a five-point scale was deliberate: it balances sensitivity with simplicity, allowing respondents to express varying degrees of agreement without overwhelming them with too many options. This format is widely recognized for capturing attitudinal data in political science research (Joshi et al., 2015). The instrument was tailored to probe issues such as candidate imposition, procedural irregularities, and members' experiences of direct primaries versus consensus arrangements. Direct primaries were measured by asking respondents whether they participated in or observed open voting processes, while consensus methods were assessed through questions on negotiated candidate selection and perceptions of inclusivity in such arrangements.

Complementary qualitative data were gathered through the systematic analysis of party documents, including official guidelines, appeals committee reports, and press statements. A thematic analysis was conducted using an inductive coding framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Codes were developed iteratively to capture recurring themes such as transparency, inclusiveness, manipulation, and conflict resolution. To enhance reliability, two independent coders reviewed the documents, and inter-ratter reliability was established through consensus discussions (Campbell et al., 2013). This process provided deeper insights into how party structures either facilitated or hindered democratic practices during the primaries.

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics to summarize trends in members' perceptions of internal democracy. The reliability of the survey instrument was confirmed using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.75, indicating acceptable internal consistency (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Ethical principles were rigorously observed throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, confidentiality was maintained, and data integrity was safeguarded to protect the rights and privacy of respondents (Israel & Hay, 2006).

Review of Literature

Internal democracy refers to the set of principles, structures, and practices that enable organization members to actively participate in decision-making processes, ensuring that governance is transparent, inclusive, and accountable. It is premised on the idea that every member should have equal access to information and opportunities to influence organizational policies and operations. This form of democracy is not only a mechanism for decision making but also a means to reduce imbalances in power that may lead to elite domination (Pateman, 1970). Researchers argue that reinforcing internal democratic practices can significantly bolster trust, satisfaction, and cohesion within an organization (Dahl, 1989; Carmines & Stimson, 1989). For example, recent findings indicate that when organizations adopt practices that facilitate open dialogue and participatory governance—such as transparent candidate selection processes—stakeholders' perceptions of fairness and legitimacy improve markedly (Rezaei, Ferraris, Busso, & Rizzato, 2022). In essence, internal democracy serves as both a catalyst for organizational reform and a critical indicator of an organization's overall health, impacting everything from operational efficiency to long-term legitimacy in the eyes of its members.

Internal democracy is characterized by first, participation. All members should have the opportunity to engage actively, contributing their opinions and votes on significant issues. This ensures that decision-making is not restricted to leadership but reflects the voices of the wider membership (Political Youth Network, 2019). Secondly, representation. Leadership and decision-making bodies must reflect the group's diversity. Open membership policies and inclusive selection processes guarantee that various demographic and ideological perspectives are considered, thereby legitimizing the decisions taken (Next IAS, 2024). Thirdly, transparency. Clear, accessible rules, procedures, and decision rationales are crucial. Transparency builds trust by enabling members to scrutinize internal operations, from financial management to candidate selection (Olof Palme International Center, n.d). Fourthly, accountability. Leaders must be held responsible for their actions through regular evaluations, internal audits, and clear disciplinary mechanisms. Accountability ensures that those in power remain answerable to the members they serve (Shankaria's parliament, 2024). Lastly, regular, free, and fair elections. Frequent internal elections conducted without bias allow for leadership renewal. This process reinforces both the legitimacy of the leadership and the members' ability to influence the organization's direction (Shankaria's parliament, 2024).

Together, these components form the backbone of internal democracy, functioning to empower members, mitigate elite dominance, and foster an organizational culture of fairness and inclusivity.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts an integrated theoretical framework that combines insights from Internal Democracy and Party Institutionalization Theories to explain how intra-party democratic practices influence the legitimacy of candidate selection processes. The framework is particularly relevant for analysing the dynamics of the APC's 2025 LGPs in Lagos State.

Internal Democracy Theory posits that the legitimacy and performance of political parties are closely linked to the extent and quality of democratic practices within the organization. According to this perspective, processes such as transparent communication, open debates, direct primaries, and equitable delegate voting ensure that the candidate selection process is both participatory and accountable (Johnson, 2018; Eze, 2021). When party members—especially those at the grassroots level—actively participate in decision-making, the resulting process is more likely to reflect collective preferences rather than the influence of a few elites. Conversely, a deficit in internal democratic practices can lead to perceptions of elite domination, lack of transparency, and internal dissent, ultimately weakening both the party's internal cohesion and its public legitimacy (Adeyemi & Olukoya, 2020).

Complementing the internal democracy perspective, Party Institutionalization Theory emphasizes the importance of formalized structures, rules, and norms within political parties. Institutionalization refers to the development of a stable and enduring set of procedures that guide internal operations—in this case, the candidate nomination process. According to Oduwon (2022) and Asuquo (2019), when a party has well-established mechanisms for decision-making, including clear guidelines and dispute resolution procedures, it is better positioned to maintain consistency and transparency in its internal processes. Furthermore, a highly institutionalized party is more resilient in the face of challenges, as its formal structures help to mitigate conflicts and ensure accountability (Innocent, 2019). Therefore, the level of institutional maturity of a party is a critical factor in determining the legitimacy of its candidate selection process.

By integrating these two theoretical perspectives, the framework for this study posits that enhanced internal democracy and strong institutional practices are mutually reinforcing. Specifically, when internal democratic practices—such as inclusive participation and transparent procedures—are rigorously employed, they contribute to the party's overall institutionalization. In turn, a robust institutional framework enhances the credibility and fairness of candidate selection processes (Johnson, 2018; Oduwon, 2022). This integrated perspective leads to the following propositions for the APC's 2025 primaries:

This theoretical framework not only informs the research questions and the design of data collection instruments--structured survey questionnaires, but also provides a basis for interpreting how internal party dynamics affect the overall legitimacy of the APC's LGPs.

Historiography of Internal Democracy in Nigeria

The historiography of internal democracy spans both global theoretical developments and context-specific analyses in Nigeria. Early foundational works—such as Pateman's (1970) treatise on participation and democratic theory—laid the groundwork by asserting that democratic legitimacy depends on meaningful member involvement within organizations. Subsequent scholars, including Dahl (1989) and Carmines and Stimson (1989), expanded on these ideas by linking procedural fairness to overall political accountability. They argued that internal democratic practices—ranging from transparent decision-making and regular leadership elections to robust accountability mechanisms—are essential for ensuring that organizations not only represent their members' interests but also maintain public legitimacy. Globally, this evolving scholarship has highlighted how shifting socio-political contexts—most notably the impacts of globalization and neoliberal reforms—have challenged traditional notions of internal democracy (Rezaei, Ferraris, Busso, & Rizzato, 2022). Researchers now adopt both normative and empirical lenses to examine how political organizations reconcile internal power struggles with broader democratic ideals.

In Nigeria, the historiography of internal democracy is intrinsically tied to the nation's turbulent political evolution. Early studies from the post-colonial period focused on party formation and the emergence of elite dominance. More recent scholarship, however, has documented chronic challenges within Nigeria's political parties—such as those in the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC)—where deficiencies in internal democratic practices have fuelled factionalism and political instability (Okoye, 2012; Momodu & Matudi, 2013). Contemporary studies further reveal that the absence of authentic internal democracy often leads to intra-party conflict and ultimately undermines efforts at broader democratic consolidation (Nwoko & Nweke, 2023).

Internal Democracy in Candidate Selection Processes: Contestsation, Dispute and the Role of Grievances

The debate surrounding internal democracy in candidate selection processes—particularly regarding contestation, dispute, and the role of grievances—is multifaceted and steeped in both theoretical and empirical discourses. On one hand, proponents argue that candidate selection should embody transparency, inclusiveness, and active participation. In this view, internal democracy is not only about procedural fairness but also serves as a built-in feedback mechanism. When party members perceive biases or elite manipulation in the candidate selection process, grievances emerge as signals of underlying power imbalances. Such discontent, when channelled through transparent grievance redress mechanisms, can spur necessary reforms. For example, Adekeye (2017) illustrates that, as explained by group conflict theory, candidate selection processes often become flashpoints where conflicting interests surface. These emerging grievances—if acknowledged—can encourage the institution of more participatory processes that bolster not just internal cohesion but also public confidence in the party.

Conversely, critics contend that unresolved grievances may escalate into prolonged intra-party disputes, undermining unity. Ojukwu and Olaifa (2011) argue that when grievances remain unaddressed, they can morph into contentious power struggles—resulting in factionalism and the weakening of the candidate selection process. Persistent contestation may lead to a situation where internal democracy transforms into a battleground, generating distractions that reduce the party's electoral competitiveness. Gambo (2022) further highlights that such disputes, if not properly mediated, can have long-term detrimental impacts on party performance, ultimately impairing governance and public trust.

This debate thus centres on the double-edged nature of grievances. On the one hand, a measured level of contestation is healthy; it signals active member engagement and serves as a corrective mechanism that drives the evolution of internal democratic practices (Pateman, 1970; Adekeye, 2017). On the other hand, excessive or mismanaged contestation can destabilize candidate selection processes and lead to wider intra-party conflicts (Ojukwu & Olaifa, 2011). In contexts like Nigeria—where historical challenges in internal democracy are well documented (Nwodo, 2010)—the stakes are particularly high. The inability of parties to manage grievances constructively has repeatedly resulted in fractious disputes that not only weaken internal structures but also cast a long shadow over electoral outcomes.

In essence, the debate calls for a balanced approach. Effective internal democracy in candidate selection hinges on establishing robust, transparent protocols and grievance redress systems that can differentiate between constructive contestation and destructive conflict. When a party can harness grievances to inform and refine its selection processes without letting them devolve into disruptive disputes, internal democracy becomes a dynamic force for positive change rather than a source of internal strife.

Internal Democracy, the APC Context

The APC embodies a complex political evolution that began with its formation as a merger of various opposition groups and has since been defined by internal contestation among diverse blocs. From its inception, the party was envisioned as a platform that would harness the strengths of many political traditions while embedding mechanisms for internal democracy. This background is critical in understanding why, as Lagos State approached its May 2025 LGPs, entrenched factions were prepared to contest candidate nominations vigorously. The party's very formation reflects a commitment to inclusiveness, though it has also given rise to structural challenges as competing interest groups vie for influence (*Vanguard Nigeria*, 2025).

As the LGPs loomed, bloc contestation became increasingly evident in Lagos State. Different political factions within the party began mobilizing around their preferred candidates and local power structures. In several LGAs and Local Council Development Areas (LCDAs), particularly in areas such as Alimosho, Agege, Lagos Mainland, Oriade, and Yaba, there were widespread allegations that the process had favoured the imposition of candidates rather than reflecting a transparent, competitive race. Grassroots members contended that the consensus methods employed marginalized dissenting voices and bypassed a genuinely democratic contest, thereby heightening internal tensions. This contest not only underscored the legacy of factional struggles inherited from the party's formation but also mirrored a broader demand for genuine representation at the grassroots level (Adeniyi, 2025; Olatunji, 2025).

In response to these challenges, the APC activated key internal democratic mechanisms designed to manage disputes and foster party unity ahead of the elections. Reconciliation committees, which were decentralized across the senatorial districts (for instance, with leadership from figures such as Dr Lateef Ibirogba in the Lagos East and Chief (Mrs) Sarah Sosan in the Lagos Central districts), were immediately inaugurated following the controversial May primaries. These committees, along with the establishment of an Appeal CommitteeHow led by prominent party figures, were intended to address grievances ranging from claims of candidate imposition to procedural irregularities during the primaries. Through these internal structures, the party demonstrated both its commitment to addressing dissent and its reliance on institutionalized internal democracy to mitigate the impact of bloc contestation (Ayobolu, 2025; Uzoechiena, 2025).

Tracing the contest from the party's formation through to the May LGPs reveals a clear narrative: the APC's enduring challenge has been balancing the need for inclusiveness and the pressures of internal power-sharing against the imperatives of maintaining a united front for electoral success. While the initial formation of the party spotlighted diversity and the promise of unified opposition, the subsequent evolution of internal factions led to significant contestation during candidate selection. These tensions, exacerbated by allegations of non-transparent processes in key areas, have pushed the APC to lean on its internal democratic apparatus as a corrective measure. The mobilization of reconciliation and appeal committees illustrates an adaptive strategy aimed at reconciling divergent blocs, thereby reinforcing the party's broader claims to democratic practice even as disputes persisted on the ground (Achenimie, 2025; Olatunji, 2025).

Beyond this specific electoral cycle, the dynamics observed in Lagos hold broader implications for internal democracy within political parties in Nigeria. As the APC continues to grapple with its pluralistic composition and the inherent contestation among internal factions, the effectiveness of its democratic mechanisms will be pivotal to its long-term cohesion and electoral success. Future investigations might explore how these internal practices compare with those of other major Nigerian political parties, or how grassroots activism might further reshape candidate selection processes in upcoming electoral cycles. Such reflections underscore the importance of institutional resilience in mitigating internal struggles while staying true to the democratic ideals the party professes.

Data Presentation, Interpretation and Analysis

Out of 400 questionnaires distributed, 377 were returned, representing a 94.3% response rate. The demographic profile shows that most respondents fall within the 25–44 age range, with nearly 40% in the 35–44 bracket. Gender participation was balanced, and more than 47% of respondents have been APC members for over 10 years. A significant proportion hold graduate-level education, indicating a relatively informed membership base.

Mean Score on Internal Democracy

Perceptions of adherence to internal democracy principles (transparency, inclusiveness, fairness, and communication) were measured using a 5-point Likert scale. The overall mean score was 2.91, slightly below the neutral midpoint of 3.0. This suggests that, on average, respondents lean toward disagreement, indicating scepticism about the party's adherence to democratic principles.

Table 1. Summary of Key Findings from Survey Responses (N = 377)

Research Question (RQ)	Key Findings	Implications
RQ1: Internal democracy & fairness	44.3% dissatisfied	Weak transparency and inclusiveness undermine legitimacy
RQ2: Voting processes	44.3% dissatisfied	Strong support for direct primaries to enhance fairness
RQ3: Barriers & challenges	63.6% identified elite dominance	Elite control distorts competition and limits participation
RQ4: Party dynamics & outlook	69% see negative impacts	Weak practices threaten unity, trust, and electoral strength
RQ5: Qualitative feedback	Calls for rules, oversight, communication	Members demand structural reforms for accountability

Source: 2025 Field Survey Research

RQ1: Perceptions of Internal Democracy and Fairness

Key finding: 44.3% of respondents (Disagree + Strongly Disagree) expressed dissatisfaction with transparency, inclusiveness, and fairness.

Implication: Nearly half of stakeholders perceive internal democratic practices as weak, pointing to systemic issues such as opaque decision-making and limited dialogue.

RQ2: Voting Processes and Decision-Making

Key finding: 44.3% of respondents expressed displeasure with current voting processes.

Implication: There is strong support for reform, particularly through direct primaries, which are viewed as a mechanism to enhance fairness and grassroots participation.

RQ3: Barriers and Challenges

Key finding: 63.6% of respondents agreed that elite dominance and internal rivalries are major obstacles to fair candidate selection.

Implication: Internal power struggles and elite control distort competition, stifle innovation, and limit member involvement. Independent oversight mechanisms may be necessary to mitigate these challenges.

RQ4: Impact on Party Dynamics and Future Outlook

Key finding: 69% of respondents (Agree + Strongly Agree) believe current practices negatively affect party unity, trust, and electoral competitiveness.

Implication: Weak internal democracy risks undermining APC's cohesion and credibility, with potential spill over effects on electoral performance.

RQ5: Qualitative Feedback

Respondents emphasized the need for:

1. Strict adherence to pre-announced rules.
2. Structures that resist elite manipulation.
3. Clear communication and involvement of all members.
4. Independent committees or audits to strengthen accountability.

Implication: Members are calling for comprehensive reforms that institutionalize transparency and inclusiveness, aligning party practices with democratic expectations.

Hypothesis Testing

Null Hypothesis (H_0): No significant relationship between internal democratic practices and perceived fairness/legitimacy.
Alternative Hypothesis (H_1): A significant relationship exists.

Regression Results:

Coefficient (β) = 0.45

Value = 0.03 (statistically significant at $p < 0.05$)

R^2 = 0.25

Interpretation: Improvements in internal democracy are positively associated with perceptions of fairness and legitimacy. Specifically, a one-unit increase in democratic practices corresponds to a 0.45 unit increase in perceived fairness. Although internal democracy explains 25% of the variance in fairness perceptions, the relationship is significant, underscoring the importance of reforms.

Discussion of Findings

The study reveals a significant disconnect between party members' expectations and the realities of internal governance within the All Progressives Congress (APC) following the 2025 Local Government Elections in Lagos State. Respondents consistently expressed dissatisfaction with transparency, fairness, and inclusiveness in party processes, while simultaneously advocating reforms such as direct A4 primaries. This duality—criticism coupled with constructive proposals—suggests that grievances are rooted in institutional and procedural shortcomings rather than mere discontent. The post-election context further amplifies these concerns, as elite dominance and caucus rivalry were widely perceived to have weakened electoral performance and heightened factionalism. In Lagos State, where grassroots mobilization and local networks are critical for electoral success, such fractures explain the party's impaired ability to translate organizational resources into cohesive campaigns.

One of the most prominent themes is the perception of elite dominance as a barrier to internal democracy. Respondents linked elite control to weakened legitimacy and reduced winning capacity. Comparative evidence from Ghana's New Patriotic Party (NPP) shows similar dynamics, where elite capture undermined grassroots participation and fuelled internal divisions (Osei & Boadi, 2021). Likewise, South Africa's African National Congress (ANC) has faced criticism for opaque candidate imposition, which eroded trust and contributed to factional disputes (Diaby, 2019). These parallels demonstrate that elite-driven candidate selection is not unique to Lagos APC but reflects a broader challenge across African party systems, where entrenched power structures distort competition and weaken cohesion.

Another critical issue is the lack of effective communication between party leadership and rank-and-file members. Respondents emphasized that opaque decision-making and poor information flow exacerbate feelings of exclusion. Comparative studies in Kenya reveal similar dynamics, where weak communication during internal primaries contributed to contested outcomes and declining public confidence in party processes (Kanyinga, 2014). These examples underscore the importance of transparent communication channels in sustaining party unity and credibility. Without clear and consistent communication, members are left alienated, undermining both trust and participation.

Quantitative analysis reinforces implications for party cohesion perceptions. Regression results revealed a statistically significant association between the quality of internal democratic practices and perceptions of fairness, demonstrating that procedural reform correlates with enhanced legitimacy. This finding supports broader theoretical claims that stronger institutional checks and democratic governance increase party credibility (Johnston & Smith, 2020). Comparative evidence from Nigeria's People's Democratic Party (PDP) also shows that weak internal democracy often translates into electoral setbacks and member discontent (Asuquo, 2022). For Lagos APC, the implication is clear: without reforms, internal fractures will continue to undermine electoral competitiveness and organizational stability. Conversely, adopting transparent, rule-based mechanisms such as direct primaries could increase member buy-in, restore legitimacy, and improve electoral prospects.

Qualitative feedback provides deeper insight into how elite manipulation and opaque practices unfold in practice. Members stressed that involving all card-carrying members in decision-making not only advances fairness but also builds resilience and unity. These findings resonate with international experiences, where inclusive participation has been shown

to mitigate factionalism and strengthen democratic consolidation (Osei & Boadi, 2021). For APC, institutionalizing transparent, rule-based processes—such as direct primaries and independent oversight committees—offers a pathway to rebuild trust and enhance long-term organizational capacity.

Respondents emphasized the need for targeted reforms to strengthen internal party democracy within the APC. Chief among these was the adoption of direct or A4 primaries, viewed as a mechanism to reduce elite dominance and foster broader trust among stakeholders. They also called for greater transparency through enforceable rules that ensure openness and accountability in party operations. Inclusiveness emerged as another priority, with recommendations to involve a wider range of members in decision-making to prevent power concentration. Finally, respondents stressed the importance of robust communication strategies to keep members informed and engaged. These proposals align with both the empirical findings of this study and broader scholarly calls for reform by Johnston & Smith, 2020; Diaby, 2019; and Osei & Boadi, 2021.

Summary of Findings

In summary, the frequency distributions across various survey modules consistently indicate dissatisfaction with current internal democratic practices within the APC, and the regression analysis confirms a meaningful relationship between these practices and the perceived fairness and legitimacy of the candidate selection process. The evidence supports the alternative hypothesis (H_1), suggesting that improving internal democracy could directly enhance the fairness of candidate selection—a finding that has significant strategic implications for party cohesion and electoral success.

Conclusion

The data paint a vivid picture of internal discontent within the Lagos APC. Nearly half of the respondents express dissatisfaction with current internal practices—whether in democratic transparency, fair and inclusive candidate selection, or the overall communication process. The regression analysis further confirms that improvements in internal democratic processes yield a measurable increase in trust and perceptions of fairness. More than two-thirds of stakeholders feel that current practices weigh heavily on party unity and electoral prospects. In essence, the party's internal dynamics are not only undermining its credibility among its members but could also translate into poor public performance come election time.

Inching Towards Solution

To address these challenges and pave the way for a revitalized, democratic, and competitive party structure, the party's institutional and structural reforms should begin with the adoption of transparent frameworks that set out clear, pre-announced rules and create robust oversight committees to safeguard every stage of internal processes, from voter registration for party elections to candidate selection. Such institutional transparency reduces perceptions of bias and elite manipulation and makes procedural breaches easier to detect and address. Complementing these measures, where practicable parties should shift to direct primaries that give grassroots members a direct voice in choosing candidates; this dilutes concentrated elite control and strengthens the legitimacy and acceptability of nominated candidates.

Enhancing communication and participation requires maintaining multiple, reliable engagement platforms so members can receive timely updates, ask questions, and provide feedback. Regular town halls, digital forums, and newsletters help normalize open dialogue and increase member involvement in decision-making. Alongside improved communication, investing in capacity building and training—through workshops and educational initiatives on internal democracy, ethical leadership, and transparent decision-making—empowers members to hold leaders accountable and to participate more knowledgeably and confidently in party affairs.

Mitigating elite dominance involves decentralizing decision-making by encouraging the formation and empowerment of local or regional committees, thereby dispersing authority and creating pathways for emerging talent and diverse perspectives. Institutional checks and balances should be established as routine mechanisms that continuously review internal practices, identify patterns of bias or manipulation, and prompt corrective actions before minor conflicts escalate into deep fractures that undermine cohesion.

A systematic approach to feedback, monitoring, and evaluation will sustain reform momentum. Parties should implement regular surveys and independent audits to collect both quantitative and qualitative evidence on member perceptions of transparency, fairness, and trust. This evidence should feed into adaptive reform processes that allow policies to be refined iteratively and responsively, enabling the party to address emerging challenges and member concerns in near real time.

Leveraging technology can make reform both more efficient and more visible. Secure, user-friendly digital platforms

for voting and communication can enhance the transparency and speed of internal elections while providing channels for ongoing engagement and feedback collection. Coupled with this, data-driven decision-making—using analytics to assess the outcomes of internal processes—can illuminate strengths and weaknesses and inform targeted adjustments to procedures and training.

Finally, a long-term strategic vision is essential to embed reforms durably. Succession planning that prioritizes merit and inclusivity over patronage builds a leadership pipeline that sustains reform efforts and signals commitment to democratic norms. Equally important is cultivating a culture of accountability in which transparency successes are recognized and instances of malpractice are confronted directly, reinforcing behavioural norms that support resilient, Democratic Party structures. By embracing these broader recommendations, Lagos APC can transform internal challenges into opportunities for renewal. Strengthening internal democratic practices is not just a matter of internal policy—it's a strategic imperative that can enhance the party's credibility, promote unity, and ultimately improve electoral performance.

Looking ahead, strategic measures should be continuously re-evaluated against evolving political realities and member expectations, ensuring that reforms remain relevant and impactful. This ongoing commitment to transparency, inclusivity, and accountability will be key in aligning the internal dynamics of the party with the broader democratic ideals that voters increasingly demand.

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APPENDIX**Survey Instrument:****Questionnaire on the Dynamics of Internal Party Democracy in Nigeria (QDIDP)**

Dear party stakeholder,

The study aims to reflect on the internal party processes, grassroots participation, and the transformative aspects of internal democracy within the APC in the conducted 2025 Local Government primary elections in Lagos State. So, this questionnaire was designed to seek your understanding and perception of your party, APC's IDP's operation within the space of its existence. For the purpose of this survey, this instrument is named "**QDIDP**". Here also, "APC" refers to the All Progressives Congress political party in Nigeria. "Internal Party Democracy (IDP)" refers to the extent to which the party adheres to democratic principles and practices within its own internal structures, processes, and decision-making. Therefore, I implore you to feel free to respond objectively to the posed questions as they will be kept confidential and also will be used for not only academic purposes but also encourage the right policy direction for a stable and effective party performance in Nigeria.

Thank you.

Section A: Demographic and Background Information of Respondent.

Mark or tick as appropriate

1. Age Bracket:

- 18- 24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55 and above

2. Gender:

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say

3. Duration of APC Membership:

- Less than 1 year
- 1-5 years
- 6-10 years
- More than 10 years

4. Role in the Primaries:

- Party Member
- Aspirant/Candidate
- Delegate
- Party Official
- Other (please specify): _____

5. Educational Background:

- O' Level
- ND/HND, NCE, Graduate Level
- Postgraduate Level

Section B: STATEMENTS ON RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Please read the following statements, and tick/mark number that best explains your opinion. **NOTE:** You can only tick one number for each statement using the scale below:

1= Agree

2= Strongly Agree

3= Disagree

4= Strongly Disagree

5 = Neutral

A: Perceptions of Internal Democracy and Fairness

1. **Transparency of Process:** The primaries process was conducted in a transparent manner. 1- { } 2- { } 3- { } 4- { } 5- { }
2. **Inclusiveness:** All eligible party members were given an opportunity to participate fully in the primaries. 1- { } 2- { } 3- { } 4- { } 5- { }
3. **Communication:** Adequate information regarding the nomination and voting procedures was communicated clearly before and during the primaries. 1- { } 2- { } 3- { } 4- { } 5- { }
4. **Fairness:** The process upheld fair competition among all candidates. 1- { } 2- { } 3- { } 4- { } 5- { }

B: Voting Processes and Decision-Making Mechanisms

1. The delegate voting system accurately reflected the will of the grassroots party members. 1- { } 2- { } 3- { } 4- { } 5- { }
2. The consensus approach in certain local government areas produced a fair outcome. 1- { } 2- { } 3- { } 4- { } 5- { }
3. The influence of senior party leaders has compromised the democratic nature of the primaries. 1- { } 2- { } 3- { } 4- { } 5- { }
4. The primary election processes used should be reformed for stronger internal democracy. 1- { } 2- { } 3- { } 4- { } 5- { }
5. What improvements would you suggest to enhance the fairness and transparency of future primaries? _____

C: Identification of Barriers and Challenges:

1. Internal impositions and favouritism were evident in the primaries. 1- { } 2- { } 3- { } 4- { } 5- { }
0. There were significant procedural irregularities that affected the candidacy selection. 1- { } 2- { } 3- { } 4- { } 5- { }
0. I felt adequately informed and involved in the candidate selection process. 1- { } 2- { } 3- { } 4- { } 5- { }
0. Please describe any barriers or challenges you observed during the primaries process. _____

D: Impact on Party Dynamics and Future Outlook:

1. The issues witnessed in the primaries may affect the APC's performance in future elections. 1- { } 2- { } 3- { } 4- { } 5- { }
2. The current internal dynamics have weakened party unity and trust among members. 1- { } 2- { } 3- { } 4- { } 5- { }
3. In your view, how do the internal democracy practices (or lack thereof) impact the long-term credibility and performance of the party? _____

E: Additional Feedback

Please provide any further comments or suggestions regarding how internal democracy can be better promoted during party primaries in APC. _____
